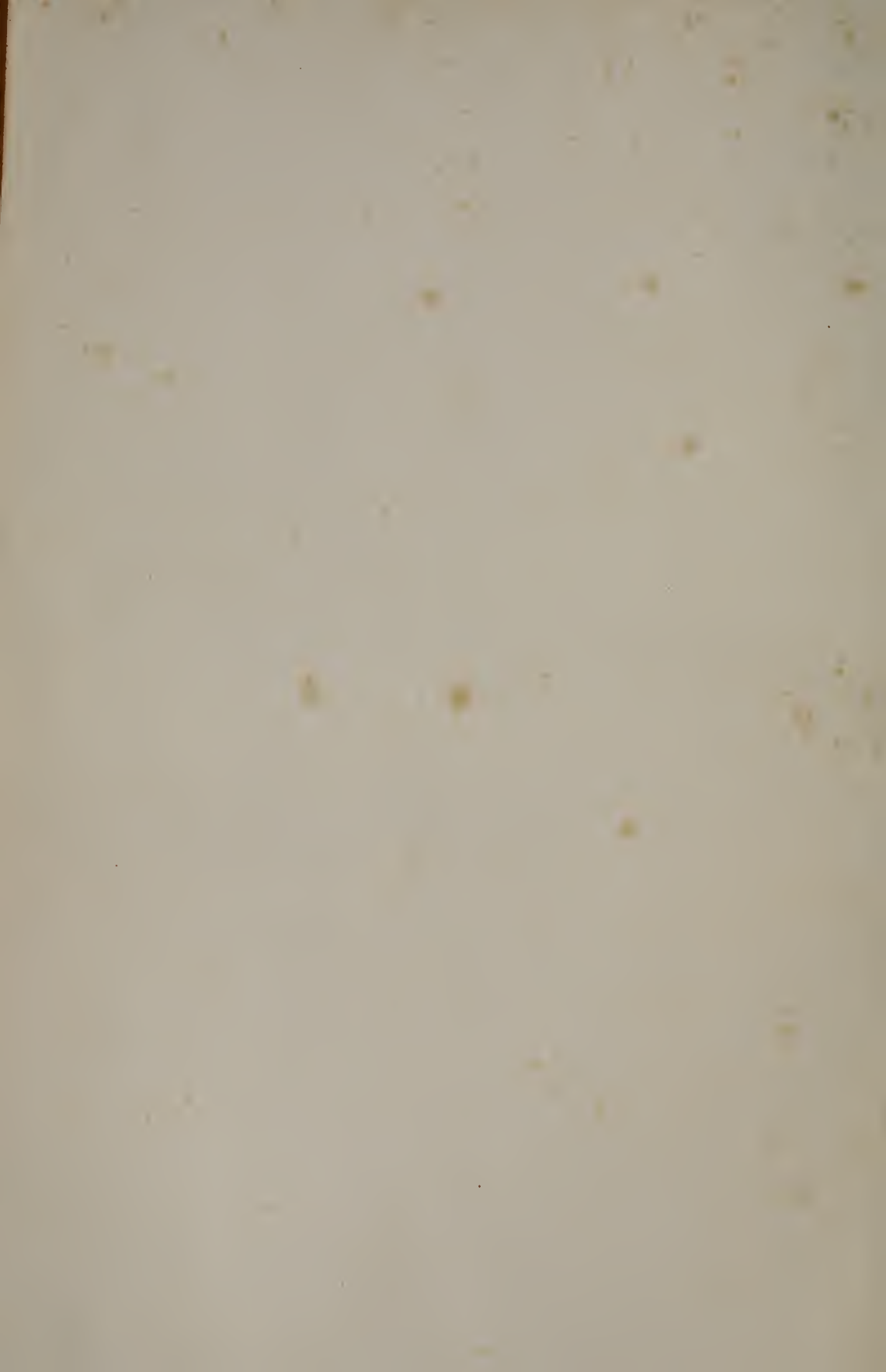




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HOME REUNION SOCIETY.

I.

THE CHURCH AND THE NONCONFORMISTS.

By JOHN SHELLY.

II.

THE CHURCH IN RELATION TO HOME REUNION.

By JOHN TREVARTHEN.

III.

THE CHURCH AND DISSENT.

By REV. CANON HOLE.

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THE CHURCH AND NONCONFORMISTS.

AN ADDRESS TO CHURCHMEN.

It has been said, and it seems to be true, that distinct stages of progress may be traced in the history of the great revival that has been going on in the Church of England during the last fifty years. There was first of all the revival of Church doctrine, then of Church life, and then of worship. And I think that the beginning of another stage may be discerned in the still more recent revival of missionary effort. In speaking of a revival of missionary effort, of course I do not mean to imply that missionary effort had ceased before. I recognise most fully the zeal and patience with which mission work was carried on, and the success which rewarded it, long before and up to the beginning of the recent period to which I have referred. But the work was individual, isolated ; it was wanting in system, and had, I venture to think, few signs of assured permanence. But there has been manifest of late in the organization and management both of home and foreign missions a greater regard to Church order and method ; and at the same time we have seen a fresh outburst of zeal and the growth of a wider, and I think more intelligent, interest in the work. Missionary effort has been recognised to be the duty of the Church as a body. It has been more clearly seen that she exists and is endowed with spiritual powers for the benefit not only of her own members, but of those who are without her pale, that she owes duties towards them and has claims upon them.

As soon as this was recognised it was inevitable that the relation of the Church to the various Nonconformist sects should become a question of greater interest and importance. Not only was it necessarily felt that "our unhappy divisions" were the greatest of all hindrances to the success of missionary effort both at home and abroad, but the recognition of the fact that the Church as a body

owed duties to those outside her pale compelled Churchmen to contemplate the possibility of adopting some other attitude towards Nonconformists than one of hostility or self-defence.

The whole of this latter period of the Church revival has been marked therefore, as might be expected, by the continual manifestation of a desire for the reunion of Nonconformists and by frequent efforts to promote it. These efforts have indeed been directed chiefly to the reunion of the great Wesleyan Society. It is only natural that this should be the first object of effort. The Wesleyans still stand, as it were, nearer the Church than any of the other Nonconformist bodies. Many of them are unwilling even to be considered dissenters at all. Their traditional theology and modes of worship are less widely different from those of the Church than are the belief and practice of the Independents, for example, or the Baptists.

But while various schemes have been put forth and efforts made for the reconciliation of the Wesleyans, it has not been for them only that the zeal of the Church has been aroused. The attitude and disposition of the Church towards Nonconformists generally have undergone a sensible change. If we look back to the tracts and controversial books of fifty years ago, or even of a much less remote period, we find the dissenter treated almost invariably, I think, as an irreconcilable enemy. We find him more generally regarded now as a possible convert. Attempts are now made to *win* those whom efforts were formerly made only to *defeat*.

And there has certainly been a corresponding change among Nonconformists. I do not say that their hostility to the Establishment is diminished, but certainly their respect for the Church has been increased. If any one doubts this, let him take the pains to compare the recent article on Disestablishment and Disendowment in the *British Quarterly Review* with the old Anti-State-Church Tracts of fifty or sixty years ago. The object is the same: the difference in tone and manner is sufficiently remarkable.

I do not wish to exaggerate either the efforts of the Church for reunion on the one side, or the signs of an approach to the Church by Dissenters on the other. I can only regard what has been said and done on the Church's part hitherto as the first beginnings, uncertain and tentative, of a great work which has yet to be fully comprehended and wisely planned. On the part of Nonconform-

ists, I rejoice to see that many of the outward tokens of their separation from the Church are being one by one abandoned. The adoption within our own memory of the word Chapel instead of meeting-house, and now very often of Church instead of Chapel, as the name of their places of worship ; the free use of Gothic architecture, and of some church-like arrangements ; the use of organs and the introduction of chanting ; the occasional use, at any rate, of set forms of service ; the religious observance of Christmas Day and Good Friday ; even the adoption of a more distinctly clerical dress by ministers ;—some of these may be trifles, and all of them taken together may not mean very much, and may co-exist, as in many cases they undoubtedly do, with the retention of a firm adherence to the principles of Dissent, but they indicate at least the abandonment of some old prejudices, they show a movement in one direction, and that the direction we desire, and they make the barrier which separates Nonconformists from the Church just so much the less formidable. Nothing that tends towards union can be wholly unimportant.

Nothing that tends to promote union, I say, can be wholly unimportant, and, on the other side, nothing which contributes to maintain or aggravate division, nothing which tends to hinder union can be a matter of unconcern to those who are anxious for the peace and prosperity of the Church. And therefore I ask you to bear with me while I point out what appear to me some faults on our side that have hindered, and must, I fear, as long as they exist, hinder the reconciliation of Nonconformists.

And first there is that most common of all faults in controversy (that almost inevitable fault, it seems), the want of justice towards our opponents. I suppose that perfect justice is really one of the rarest of all virtues. In this particular case the want of justice chiefly shows itself in the tacit assumption that Nonconformists admit our fundamental principles. It is assumed, for instance, that Nonconformists must understand particular texts, such as texts relating to the kingdom of heaven, to the new birth, or to Confirmation, as we do, and that they see in them the allusion we see. The fact is that we interpret these texts by a Church tradition, and they by a Nonconformist tradition, which makes the same words mean to them and to us entirely different things, and if we would be fair we must try to understand what their

interpretation is, and not think we have settled the matter when we have flung a text at their heads which to our minds is conclusive. Then, again, we are apt to forget that they and we mean perfectly different things by the word "Church." In fact, if a Dissenter once accepts our meaning of the word "Church" he is more than half a Churchman already. To us the Church is a Divine institution, to him it is a mere human organisation. Hence the idea of dissent also is a very different thing to his mind and to ours. To us it means separation from the institution Divinely appointed for the salvation of the world: to him, a Baptist we will suppose, it means no more than not being a Churchman, a fact of no greater religious importance to him than not being a Methodist or an Independent. We shall not and cannot be just to Nonconformists unless we clearly remember all this in our intercourse with them.

The distinction which many Churchmen are fond of drawing between what they call religious and political dissenters also appears to me to be unfairly pressed. That there are some dissenters who are more active as politicians than others, and who take a special interest in the ecclesiastical side of politics, I do not pretend to deny. Why should they not do so if they like? Are there not at least as many Churchmen who take a deep interest and active part in political questions of the same character on the other side? Do we not know that many of these political Churchmen are thoroughly religious, devout men? and why do we doubt that those whom we call political dissenters are the same? The political side of the Church of England as an established Church seems to me to be a fair object of attack and defence irrespective of its religious aspect. It is perfectly conceivable that one person may have a greater dislike to the political privileges of the Church, and another to its religious doctrines. Their dissent may rest on different grounds, but they may both be equally conscientious and may equally deserve to be treated with respect. I cannot imagine why the man who objects to the political privileges of the Church should be met with indignation or contempt as a political dissenter, while the man who objects to her doctrines is treated with respect as a religious dissenter.

Again, I do not think Churchmen generally give Nonconformists credit for the real goodness and deep devotion which so many

of them possess. True and deep religious life is so sensitive, shrinks so much from observation, and especially from the observation of those whom it supposes to be out of sympathy with it, that persons belonging to different religious bodies can very rarely fully appreciate, and sometimes can hardly even recognise, one another's piety. I am afraid that Nonconformists generally think Church people "worldly." I know that many converts from dissent have been astonished, and I must confess I was myself, to discover how much deep devotion there is existing in the Church. We knew that it *ought* to be so because we had accepted the doctrine of the Church, but we could not believe that it *was* so till we had entered into the Church and seen it for ourselves.

And so, on the other hand, Churchmen know so little in general of the inner life of Nonconformists, that it is hard for them to believe in a piety which they have no opportunity of observing. But it is there, all the truer because hidden from the common gaze. Oh, if these holy men and women had but the treasures of sacramental grace which we neglect or wantonly waste, what heights of sanctity might they not attain! "Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down in the kingdom of heaven, but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out."

If the real piety and devotion of dissenters were more fully recognised by Churchmen it would give, I think, a somewhat different character to our efforts for their reconciliation. We should seek it, as the Bishop of Exeter said at the meeting of the Home Reunion Society during the Church Congress at Plymouth, "for love and not for triumph." It is in this spirit alone that we must seek it if we are to be successful.

Again it is a real misfortune I think that Churchmen do not take more pains to make themselves acquainted with the good works that are carried on by Nonconformists. It is true that it is generally impossible for us actively to co-operate with them. It is true that as all our spiritual power and energy are derived through the Church, we cannot use them in opposition to the Church, nor can we even use them apart from the Church. Our whole motive and manner of work must therefore be different from those of Nonconformists. This difference is fundamental and I do not see how it is ever to be removed as long as we are Churchmen and they continue to be Nonconformists. But I do

not think this difference is such as to prevent us from feeling and showing a real and hearty interest in their work as long as their work is positive and constructive. "He that is not against us is with us." As long as they are teaching positive truth their teaching is good so far as it goes; they are teaching part of the Catholic faith, though not the whole of it. I suppose indeed that, if they could see it, the whole Catholic faith is involved in the portion of it which they hold. Their rejection of the rest is really an inconsistency. But if this be so, surely they are far more likely to be led to enquiry and to progress by our interest and sympathy than to be driven to it by our coldness and reproof.

I do not say it is easy; it is very difficult, but I think it is possible to feel and to show interest and sympathy, while maintaining unaltered and undisguised our conviction that all religious work undertaken apart from the Church must be imperfect in its conception, its execution, and its results.

I am quite sure,—indeed it is self-evident as soon as it is put into words, that we are far more likely to win Nonconformists to the Church by drawing them on as persons who have imperfectly learned the truth, than by attacking them as persons who are wholly in error. And the former course is not only the course of prudence, it is the course of justice.

We cannot in justice treat what are commonly called the orthodox Dissenters as Gnostic and Manichean heretics were treated by the early Church. We must remember too that the strength of the language used by the early Fathers about heresy and schism may have arisen partly from a sense of the peril to which they exposed an infant society by weakening it in the face of the determined opposition of the heathen world, as well as from the perception of their intrinsic evil. I do not of course mean to say that heresy and schism are not grievous sins, or that they are not just as sinful now as ever they were, but though involving great spiritual loss to Dissenters themselves and largely weakening the Church, still they are less directly perilous to the Church now than in the comparative feebleness of her early days. We may admire therefore without feeling ourselves bound to imitate the fierce indignation of the early confessors and champions of the Catholic Faith.

I have said that as long as the teaching of Dissenters is positive and constructive it is generally catholic. Their errors for the most part are errors of defect. And this seems to me to indicate the true means of winning them to the Church. Do not attack their errors. Do not argue with them at all, or argue with them as little as possible about those points on which they differ from the Church, but lead them to positive statements of their own faith. The more positive they become, the more clearly they recognize and define their own belief, the more catholic they become. This is not a mere theory, it is a fact. I remember very well a Churchman telling me of a long conversation he had with a Wesleyan. The Wesleyan was arguing against the Real Presence, the Churchman was defending it. The longer they argued, the further the Wesleyan seemed to retire from the doctrine of the Church. At last the Churchman said to him, "What do you believe about it yourself? would you call it merely bread and wine? The Wesleyan was driven to consider, to recognize his own faith. He paused. "Well, no," he said at last, "I should not like to say that." He was more of a Catholic than he thought. I was reading the other day the life of John Hunt, a Wesleyan Missionary in Fiji. He writes one day in his journal, "I was led to dwell particularly on CHRIST'S Presence in the sacrament. Perhaps this truth has been so much perverted by Papists, that Protestants have gone to the opposite extreme. There is a Presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, which is real to every believer. Of course it can be only a spiritual presence; for what else can be present to the spirit" (p.211). He is positive and constructive, and therefore so far catholic, but presently he feels called upon to protest against Popery, and immediately becoming negative, he falls into confusion and error, and denies that there is a "bodily presence" of Christ in the Eucharist, as if the presence of His Body could be anything else than a bodily presence.

There is another remarkable instance showing how much more nearly the positive teaching of Dissenters approaches that of the Church than their negations would lead one to suppose in an essay by Mr. R. W. Dale on the Lord's Supper in a volume of Congregational Essays called *Ecclesia*, where Mr. Dale argues against the low views of the Lord's Supper held by some

Nonconformists in this way. There must always, he says, be some root or germ of the abuse of a thing or of false doctrine, in the proper use of it, or in the true doctrine. But there is no root or germ from which the highest view of the Sacrament (which of course he calls an abuse or false doctrine) could grow in the low views of many Dissenters. Therefore their low views are not the true and primitive doctrine of the sacrament. I have stated this argument from memory, but I think with general correctness, as it serves again to show, I think, how when a Nonconformist realizes his own belief and states it in positive terms he always begins to approach at least to the Catholic Faith. I do not know that there would be any more likely way of converting an Independent, for instance, who practises Infant baptism to the true faith concerning baptism than by setting him to answer the arguments of the Quakers who reject baptism altogether.

It is important too to make Nonconformists perceive that in accepting the faith of the Church they will lose no single truth they now hold or ever held. The Catholic Faith,—the faith of the Church, is the complete body embracing every portion of religious truth. "Catholicism," as Dr. Littledale says in his essay in the third series of *The Church and the World*, "means not the rating of all religious opinions as equally tenable and equally trivial, but the union and harmonizing of every element of spiritual truth, wherever found, in one homogeneous body. Every sect which has any spiritual vitality at all, lives by the force of the fragment of truth which it possesses, not by the mass of error in which that truth is embedded. And the Catholic Church is able to say to every sectary, Come to me, and I will give you the truth which you hold already and many others with it of which you are still ignorant." (p. 60)

One result of this completeness and many-sidedness of the Church is that different minds are attracted to her by different portions or aspects of her doctrine or nature. But unity will generally be, I think, that character of the Church which will be most attractive to Nonconformists. Not always her present unity, though they may recognize it as essentially existing in her creeds and sacraments in spite of outward divisions between east and west. More often perhaps it will be her historical unity, the continuity of the past and present exhibited in her creeds, her

orders, her sacraments, her offices, in the unbroken and universal offering in all times and places of the one sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, in the communion of saints. To those who from their earliest infancy have been trained in the use of the prayers of the Church, it is difficult perhaps even to imagine the thrill of delight and exultation with which one begins to use as one's own, the words which have been consecrated, as it were, in the lips of martyrs and saints and many generations of faithful men and women.

It is no mere imagination, no dream of fancy, that our prayers are helped and our efforts strengthened by being thus offered and put forth in the power of the communion of saints. This and other fruits of the unity of the Church are our Lord's great gift offered alike to us and to our Nonconformist brethren ;—to them we trust to be ultimately accepted, to us to be cherished and maintained as well for their sakes as for our own.

Not all at once perhaps or even speedily may we expect the accomplishment of our great hope of corporate Reunion, but we may at least invite individual Nonconformists to pray with us that our Lord would grant unto us that peace and unity which are agreeable to His will, and it may be that the prayer will beget desire, and that the desire may lead to the fulfilment of our Lord's own prayer "that they all may be one."

JOHN SHELLY.

NOTE.

The foregoing address was delivered to a meeting of Churchmen, but a report of it which appeared in a local newspaper drew from a Nonconformist correspondent the natural and perfectly fair remark that Churchmen ought to settle their own differences first before they appeal to Nonconformists to join them for the sake of unity. I fully admit the implied reproach. No one, I think, can feel more deeply and bitterly than I do the mischief of disunion within the Church, as well as of separation from it. And yet, if we look at the matter fairly, there is surely a great deal to be said on the other side. I do not profess to be deeply learned in ecclesiastical history, but, if I mistake not, there have always, even from apostolic days, been great diversities of opinion within the Church. The mediæval controversies between Nominalists and Realists, Thomists and Scotists, went deep down, almost to the very heart of the faith. I think we can trace in almost every age within the Church itself the existence of parties or schools of thought answering very much to the High, Low, and Broad Church parties in the Church of England at present. It seems to me inevitable that this should be the case, because I believe that these three great parties represent permanent varieties in the constitution of the minds of men. The fact that the Church is wide enough to embrace these varieties seems to me to be one evidence of her catholicity. The unity of the Church—the ideal unity which as a Churchman I desire and pray for—is not an absolute unity of opinion and sentiment. It is a unity of worship, of belief, of sacramental incorporation into one body—"One Lord, one faith, one baptism." To avoid misunderstanding, let me say that by unity of belief I mean of divine faith, which is consistent, I repeat, with great diversities of opinion and sentiment. I admit, and accept the reproach, that the controversies in the Church of England have exceeded the limits of charity; I fear that in some instances they may go beyond mere opinion and sentiment, and touch divine faith; but I have no doubt whatever that the Bishop of Exeter was entirely right when he said, in an unreported speech during the Church Congress at Plymouth, which I quote from my own notes, that "Our differences are nothing to our agreement; we are all bound together in the Church by a tie that cannot be broken."

In giving the address I had no intention whatever of putting myself forward as a mediator between Churchmen and Nonconformists. It would be impertinent for me to dream of such a thing. But I felt that for me, as a convert from Dissent, it was more possible than for most people to understand and point out to Churchmen the hindrances, the unnecessary hindrances, to reunion which are sometimes caused by Churchmen themselves. This was what I endeavoured to do, and this was all that I had any right to attempt at a meeting consisting of Churchmen only. I have thought, however, for years past, that good might result from occasional meetings of Churchmen and Nonconformists for religious conference, and not for controversy. There is much misunderstanding on both sides, a good deal of it merely verbal, which I think such meetings might contribute to remove. But I should desire conference on matters on which we are agreed rather than on points of difference. It would be the wildest enthusiasm to suppose that reunion is likely to be achieved at once, or even within any period that we can forecast. But surely on both sides we may desire it and may pray for it. "O pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love Thee. For my brethren and companions' sake, I will now say, peace be within thee." It seems to me that such desires and prayers cannot be altogether fruitless.

J.S.

THE CHURCH IN RELATION TO HOME REUNION.

It is a well-known fact in the history of the Church of Christ that, in its earliest days, "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul" (Acts iv. 32). It must be equally well remembered that the Head of the Church, in that marvellous prayer left us in the seventeenth chapter of St. John's Gospel, when He interceded in gracious love and wisdom for the Church of the future, besought the Father "that they all may be one; as Thou Father art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent Me."

The normal condition of the Christian Church, then, is clearly one of unity and love—for its own sake, and the success of its work; nor are we justified in expecting that the world will believe in the mission of the Church, unless its members strive after holding "the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace."

This being so, what an awful responsibility lies somewhere for the disunion of Christendom, now so patent to all! Let us be thankful that the Church of England is awaking to a sense of *her* responsibility in this matter. "The Home Reunion Society" is constituted in the hope of bringing about some practical efforts towards that unity which must be the fervent aspiration and prayer of every faithful Christian. An unmistakeable yearning after unity is a sign of our times, and must surely be in answer to the special prayers, which of late years have been so frequently offered by Churchmen, that our blessed Lord would "grant His Church that peace and unity which is agreeable to His holy will."

Let me now bring the matter nearer home, and consider the duty nearest to our hand—which, as a rule, is the one demanding out first attention. While we very properly lament and pray over the disunion of Christendom as a whole, let us try to solve the dif-

ficulties as they stand around us here at home. In a word, let us face the great fact that the Church *in* England is far from being, as she should be, the Church *of* the people of England. It is matter for serious reflection, why are so many earnest-minded Christian people outside our Communion? There can be little doubt that if all our Dissenting fellow-countrymen were one with us, the work of bringing in the masses of unbelievers which surround us would be very much facilitated.

As Churchmen, we must admit that a good deal of the Nonconformity over which we mourn now, is the legacy to us of the ill-will and apathy of Churchmen in times past. Dissent, having gained a footing, has become hereditary; and many of those attached to Nonconformist bodies have never thought of belonging to any other—have, in fact, simply inherited their religious profession. This reflection should stir us up to affectionate solicitude for our brethren who have lost opportunities which we enjoy, and should move us to atone, as far as we can, for the errors of our forefathers. Let us do something to leave our country, in this respect, better than we found it.

Assuming, then, that Churchmen must do something towards bringing about union with Dissenters, the question is, How are we to go to work? Special efforts are necessary, and this necessity, from the nature of the case, is a growing one. The "Home Reunion Society" issues a practical programme, to which I direct earnest attention; and on the lines laid down by that Society much good may be done, and done forthwith, if Churchmen will but face their duty in this matter. So great an undertaking as bringing all Nonconformists within the fold of the Church of England is *apparently* impossible, but it remembers that "with God all things are possible," and cannot doubt a rich blessing will follow all sincere endeavours to bring about "a consummation so devoutly to be wished." The Society can, at least, strive to arouse Churchmen to a sense of their duty, in a spirit of brotherly love, and this it has already done to a hopeful extent.

It is evident that unity between the Church and Dissenters must be attempted either by going down to the level of Dissenters or by bringing them up to ours. As to the former, we cannot attempt to gain Dissenters by giving up vital distinctions of doctrine and practice. "Holding the truth" is a primary duty of Churchmen—but always "in love."

Neither let it be supposed that we can win Nonconformists by undervaluing, or apologizing for, our own system. They know, as well as we do, that there are matters of most important doctrine and principle at issue between us ; and it would be worse than folly for us to ignore such matters. Let us rather seek to justify our firm attachment to the principles we represent and love, not in the spirit of aggrandizement, but from a desire that others should share our greater privileges.

Then as to raising Dissent to our own level, we may well remember Lord Derby's advice to his friends in Lancashire the other day ; namely, to be very careful when pulling our neighbour out of a ditch that he does not pull us in. Still, this is the only method we can adopt. We must first make our own footing quite sure, in the possession of steadfast faith, and then put out the hand of love to our less-privileged brethren. The lever for this work is the inherent attractiveness of the truth, as held and practised by the Church. Let us be careful to do justice to our principles, by exemplifying their great superiority in our daily lives, and this by God's blessing will soon prove attractive to outsiders. If the Church be indeed the body of Christ, may we not believe of her, as of her Head—"I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me." We cannot doubt that the Church would draw all men into it, if all her members were more faithful to their Lord. The want of this has resulted in a Babel of sectarianism—a bitter legacy—and so it must continue, until we make men see "we are one with Christ, and Christ with us."

Let us now briefly glance at the difficulties, in detail, which stand in the way of Home Reunion. They are partly on our side, and partly on the side of Nonconformity.

On our side, a practical difficulty is the painful fact that in these days we are confronted with a good deal of what is known as "political dissent," in which the religious element is comparatively small. This, of course, is outside the sphere of Reunion, and with it the Church can never negotiate. The Church is assured of eventual triumph over her enemies ;—she dare not make terms with them. It is a hopeful sign that other Nonconformists are deprecating this kind of Dissent in the public prints.

In the next place, a real difficulty on our side is, that the Church as the guardian of God's truth, cannot make overtures to

heresy or wilful schism. These are things we continually pray against, and we must therefore strive against them, though they be ever so religious in appearance and intention. While careful not to magnify differences, we cannot forget that we are face to face with some active forms of false doctrine and practice. It must, however, be borne in mind that Nonconformists have been brought up to believe that sects and divisions are often a great advantage. They have not been taught to consider separation sinful. They mostly hold that any "company of faithful men" is a Church. They ignore any duty of allegiance or responsibility to, what we might call, the historical polity of Christendom, and have no place in their systems for what we call "church authority."

Then a third difficulty on our side, and a daily increasing difficulty is, that we have to deal with carefully organized systems of ministry and worship, in contravention of what the Church has held and taught in all ages. I fear the several hierarchies (so to speak) of Dissent are amongst the greatest obstacles with which Home Reunionists will have to contend. Overtures to bodies of Nonconformists will be of little or no use; our hope is with the members of these societies individually. We shall sooner attract unofficial adherents, than those who are in places of authority.

These practical difficulties from the Churchman's side must be all honestly faced in the work to which we address ourselves. Perhaps a consideration of the difficulties of Reunion from the Dissenter's point of view, may help us to some modification of what might seem a "forlorn hope."

As a native of Cornwall, a county which owes so much to the great English Apostle, John Wesley, brought up in early life amongst those who have, alas! separated in so many ways from the original constitution of the Society of Methodists, and having had special opportunity of seeing the working of various types of Dissent, I have learnt from them some of the difficulties on their side in the way of "Home Reunion." I will not attempt to recount all their objections to the Church, but I will mention a few of their candid criticisms, in matters wherein we shall do well as I think, to profit by their observations from without. Let us "see ourselves as others see us."

I. They say the Church is too clerical, too much "on stilts."

The Laity have neither power nor position, say they, in the details of the Church's work. Laymen have the privilege of contributing their substance, but their province for personal service is undefined, almost non-existing. The Clergy carry on their work as parochial autocrats, afraid to trust the Laity beyond collecting alms or teaching in the Sunday School; and the Laity seem equally afraid of their clergy.

They say, moreover, we are so dignified that we cannot tolerate enthusiasm, whether Lay or Clerical, but especially the former—that as soon as a man begins to be thoroughly in earnest about religious matters, he finds the Church uncongenial, and is tempted to Nonconformity. From this, they argue, that in respect to the position of the laity, dissenters would be considerable losers by a transfer of allegiance.

Remembering how practically the Wesleyans, for instance, utilise lay energy, and how very little the Church does so, we cannot expect earnest-minded men to entertain the idea of joining a body, in which they might be relegated to the frigid corners of its stately system and condemned to comparative uselessness. There are many of our own laity, who from personal experience, could tell a Dissenter that he is better off in his sect for opportunities of usefulness, than he would be in the Church! This, then, is a matter, which for our sakes, and that of the Church, we should endeavour to mend, before we can hope to attract the earnest Nonconformist. Let us strive to learn that it is true wisdom to utilise all powers and talents in the Church's service. Alas! we ignore and repress many agencies our neighbours would glory in, and we are but slowly awakening to improvement in this respect.

II. A second difficulty with conscientious Dissenters, is that we are neither constitutional nor self-governing as a body. Many Churchmen are indeed conscious that in matters spiritual the Church is not free to manage her own affairs. This arises from a variety of historical causes, and is already receiving its full share of anxious attention. Our efforts in the way of Conferences, Synods, and the Reform of Convocation, are proofs that the Church of England realises her difficulties, and by careful measures is endeavouring to remove them.

III. A third charge is that we depreciate preaching to which

Nonconformists attach supreme importance. It is said we do not train our Clergy to preach, and so many Sermons are evidently the productions of "men who have to say something, rather than of men who have something to say." It must be admitted that we have not always sufficiently valued the importance and power of preaching. The High Church revival of the present century was perhaps retarded by the low estimation in which its early leaders held sermons. We have become wiser of late, and moral essays or homiletics, whether long or short are becoming happily less in number. Sermonizing has actually called a Society into existence for its cultivation and improvement, and while some of our pulpit effusions are unsurpassed in ancient or modern times, taken as a whole they will compare very favourably with those of any other Church or religious body. Let us do all we can to secure the Church its needful supply of able, well-trained and eloquent preachers, and this will prove a great attraction for Nonconformists, who in this matter simply share the marvellous love of sermons which is characteristic of English people. And one word more here, do let us work into our preaching forces the capable laity,—of course under proper regulation. The Church of England can surely raise from her midst an army of Lay-preachers as easily as the Wesleyans, and why not? This would be a means of multiplying Church influences, the value of which it is impossible to over-estimate; and considering the patent insufficiency of our ministrations for the requirements of our teeming population, it would seem absolutely culpable to neglect the use of it.

Our various Societies of Laymen, already more or less engaged in Church work, would furnish many qualified persons; but it is the duty of the Church to call them out, and not expect the men to force themselves through the "hard and fast" lines at present existing. We might then reasonably hope that ardent souls amongst our Nonconformist brethren, would more readily believe in us and our system. They have been accustomed to heart-stirring addresses, and plenty of them; we must meet this want, if we desire to win Dissenters, or even retain our indifferently-attached members.

IV. Another drawback, in the eyes of Dissenters, is the want of opportunities for intercommunion between our members. Any

one who knows the organization of the Wesleyans, for example, must acknowledge that we might learn something from their class-meetings, prayer-meetings, love-feasts, &c. Every member's attachment is fostered by frequent contact with others in the work of the Society. This is left to spontaneous action in the Church ; and, though we have done something by the establishment of guilds and kindred associations (to which I can personally bear very grateful testimony), still, in this respect, we are far behind our Dissenting neighbours, and should therefore lose no time in improving our arrangements. Church people have no notion of fraternizing with one another as such, whereas Dissenters gain enormous strength thereby.

V. The last charge which I shall notice is perhaps a strange one to come from Separatists, but it is one which carries sad conviction of truth with it, and is perhaps the greatest obstacle to "Home Reunion." They say we are "a house divided against itself"—that the trumpet gives an "uncertain sound."

We are not at unity within the Church as we should be ; but the "Home Reunion Society" addresses itself to the removal of this stumbling-block as one of its objects. It is, however, only fair to say, that our points of agreement are many, and our disagreements very few—far fewer than many suppose. We can, and do, work well together in Congresses and Synods, and our disunions are very much exaggerated because made very public. Moreover, it is a far *less* evil that there should be minor divisions *within* a body like the Church of England than that they should take the shape of new organizations and sects. No matter how much our clergy may differ on minor points, there is agreement in all essential matters, from a formal and solemn acceptance of the same creeds and formularies.

Still we shall do well to take to heart "our unhappy divisions," and there is nothing more certain, than that real efforts towards a more perfect understanding between the various schools within our Church would prove a speedy blessing to us all. An earnest and pious Wesleyan who left us a few years since, "frozen out," answered my entreaty to return, a short time since, by saying it was quite useless inviting Dissenters while we are so divided within the Church, and find so little employment for those who desire to work for their Lord. While there is any truth in such

objections, let us strive diligently to remove the cause of offence.

These are a few of the more practical reflections which must be considered by Churchmen anxious to remove the sad reproach of divisions in our midst. We must remember that our great appeal should be to "the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship;" and our only hope lies in the knowledge that we are working in love for the honour of our Lord, Whose will concerning His Church is, that it should be "a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish."

We may profitably remember that Dissent has grown by reason of the Church overlooking or neglecting points of Christian faith and practice; and therefore we may not regard Nonconformists as wholly wrong, and we ourselves entirely right. God has gracious designs for all His servants, and we must be careful not to condemn our brethren too hastily. It has been well said, "Is there any quarry which shall contribute none of the materials with which the Church of the future, 'made perfect in one,' shall be built? Shall any colour be excluded, when beyond the present mist and storm cloud, the rainbow shall appear, of which

The various tints unite
And form in Heaven's sight
One arch of peace."

We may reasonably take courage from many signs of the times, and with God's blessing, the "Home Reunion Society" has a grand work before it, which, succeeding, shall do very much to promote "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men." Amen.

JOHN TREVARTHEN.

Redhill, Surrey,
24th Nov., 1877.

THE CHURCH AND DISSENT.

BY REV. CANON HOLE.

A TRUE desire for unity can only exist in the hearts of sincere and earnest Christians, who have learned something of the mind which was in Him who prayed that we might all be one ; and therefore, in our considerations of reunion between the Church and Dissent we must leave out all mere professors, formalists, and partisans. We must eliminate, on the one hand, all those who are Church people, mainly because Papa has a pew ; who go to church once a week, hebdomadal Christians, to keep up appearances, “for the sake of the young people and the servants, you know ;” who go because landlords, and employers, and customers, and genteel people, and carriage-folk—will be there ; or because the Church is a national institution, and it is their solemn conviction that if they do not patronise it now and then it must decay, dissolve, and, like the baseless fabric of a dream, leave not a wreck behind. And, on the other hand, we must decline to notice those who are Dissenters from social and political, but not from spiritual, motives. We must refuse to listen to any railing accusations from one side or the other ; to the intolerant parson, who tells his people that the first Dissenter was Cain ; or to the Baptist leader, who, in speaking recently of the Churches of Ireland and England, compared them to Ananias and Sapphira, and foretold a like destruction. No, we must “let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from us, with all malice ;” and then, when this high and holy ambition, the reunion of Christians, is prayerfully, tenderly studied and discussed by those who love the church or who love the chapel, only because they believe in their hearts that in the church or in the chapel they can comprehend more clearly “the truth as it is in Jesus”—then, and then only, can we await in sure and certain hope the promised benediction of God All earnest Christians hate strife and

yearn for peace. It is the unstable and the insincere, not having the faith, nor the courage, to give their life to God, who are loud in controversy, and try to believe that they are religious, because they are ever denouncing the weaknesses and protesting against the mistakes of others. It is these men whose counsel, like Moloch's, is for open war, who delight in magnifying the differences between Church and Dissent, who say to all men, "Be avenged of your adversary," instead of "Sirs, ye are brethren." At the Church Congress, the other day, one of the speakers told us, that in passing through the streets he noticed a crowd of boys, evidently influenced by a great excitement, and he found on inquiring that they were anxiously instigating two of their companions to fight. So he addressed himself to the principals for whom a duel was proposed, and asked them, "Do you want to fight?" and when they promptly answered, "No, sir," then said he, "Don't," and they didn't. They shook hands, to the disgust and dispersion of those truculent young rascals, who shouted for the battle. And this suggests a question, serious and sad—who shall be first to hold out the hand of friendship? The answer is plain as painful—the one who provoked the quarrel, the Church of England. Let me speak of facts within my own experience. In my boyhood and early youth I never even saw the man to whom had been entrusted the spiritual charge of the parish in which I lived. He did not reside in the same county. A curate had lodgings five miles away, and came to us once a week for one brief, cold, heartless service. My memory recalls him as he stands, with his overcoat, hat, and riding-whip upon the Holy Table, asking from the sexton whether there were any infants to be baptised (at home, of course, in a pudding-basin), or any dead to be buried in a churchyard, which was the village playground, and where horses were turned out to graze. The sparrows twittered and the bats glided silently overhead, the beetles crawled over the damp, broken floor below; prayers, canticles, psalms were read by the parson and his *vis-à-vis*, the clerk, only; and then, as you have seen at a circus the active horseman drop his outward raiment, and suddenly assume a new costume and character, so was the surplice hastily doffed, and the preacher gave us a sermon, old and dingy as the gown in which it was preached. There was no visiting, no teaching, no almsgiving, no sympathy,

no love. The shepherds ate of the fat and clothed themselves with the wool, but they did not feed the flock. Was it strange that the sheep should wander, when the fold was unguarded and the pasture bare? Was it strange that men who felt that they had these souls to save, and had found a Saviour, should exhort and encourage one another, and should assemble themselves together where they could, because the temple of the Lord was closed? I say the memory of those men is blessed; and, though you may affirm that their successors in many instances have not their devoted piety, that they seem very often to be influenced by prejudice rather than by principle, and that in these days, when the Church is awake and putting on her strength, they cannot plead the same just motives for separation, I say, instead of being deluded by Satan—instead of hating those whom she has wronged—instead of denouncing and deriding, the Church is bound to regard Dissent with shame and humility, to pray with all her heart, to ponder with all her mind, and to work with all her might and means, for reunion with those whom, had she been faithful to her trust, she would not have alienated, estranged, and lost.

And, again, it must be remembered that in addressing Dissenters you accost them by a title which they do not own. They will tell you that they are constant to a religion in which many of them were born, and that they believe in it as firmly as you believe in yours. Or perhaps they may say that you may call them Dissenters, if you please, inasmuch as the history of religion is the history of Dissent, the East from the West, England from Rome, Geneva from England, Protestant from Catholic, Nonconformist from Churchmen, differences of administration, they may argue, but from the same Spirit. And though you feel sure that they are wrong, and that disunion is wrong, is there not yet another consideration which should make us very gentle, very careful when we are tempted to reproach or reform. I mean the consciousness of dissent between our own will and God's will, the voice of the prophet sounding in our ears, "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God." And of this I am quite sure, that while all denunciations, all demands of allegiance, all satire, however caustic, all mere controversial arguments will repel rather than attract, that spirit of humility which recognises a wrong and seeks to repair it, will evoke the sympathy for which it prays and

works. It may be repelled by the arrogant, misunderstood by the ignorant, mistaken for weakness, for cowardice, for deceit by the suspicious ; but it will be appreciated by good and generous men. Though the enterprise seems sometimes hopeless, and we sigh, "I labour for peace ; but when I speak unto them thereof they make ready to battle ;" if we will only "let patience have her perfect work," if we will only "learn to labour and to wait," though we may not see in this world the results for which we toil (and we are but as men clearing the ground from ruins, that others may rebuild, but as men ploughing and sowing, breaking up fallow ground), be sure that there shall come hereafter, in the good time of the Almighty, first the blade and then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear. God encourages this faith and hope. At a mission which I conducted no long time ago in this diocese, only two or three Dissenters attended our first services ; but when, in one of the addresses, I expressed the views which I have expressed to you on the spirit in which, as it seemed to me, the Church should regard Nonconformists, they came in numbers ; indeed, the last night of the mission (Sunday) they closed their chapels, that all might come to it. Nor can I refrain, though I be accused of egotism (and yet how can one prefer facts to theories, and expression to experience, without it ?), nor can I refrain from repeating a compliment paid to me by a worthy old Wesleyan, when he remarked to the Vicar of his parish, for whom I had been preaching a harvest sermon, "they tell me he's one of them Romans, but I like to hear the man." Why ? because our hearts were united by their love of the Lord Jesus, and this commandment have we from him, "that he who loveth God, love his brother also."

But while history and conscience teach us humility, they bid us also to be honest, and loyal and brave. They repeat to us the words which the late Bishop of Exeter addressed to the Archbishop of Canterbury : "My lord, no good ever yet came from the sacrifice of truth to peace." They warn us that when great cracks break out in our walls and ceilings, it won't do to daub with untempered mortar, and paste a pretty paper over, and say, "How nice it looks !" but we must strengthen the foundation of the house. Let us be sincere, candid, outspoken to each other ; let us not waste our breath and our soap in blowing bubbles which

so quickly burst, but let us utilise them in earnest pleading for the truth, and in washing our hands and faces. Don't let us deceive one another with false notions that separation is strength—(behold how good and joyful a thing it is, brethren, *not* to dwell together in unity)—and that every man may do that which is right in his own eyes, if it seemeth to him to be right. Oh, beware of that easy, and greasy benevolence whose text is, “It does not matter.” “There lives more faith in honest doubt, believe me, than in half the creeds ;” because so many love not the truth well enough to contend earnestly for it. Men talk about concessions of Church principles and Church property ; they are not ours to concede.

Let me briefly illustrate my meaning :—1st. As to principle. So long as the Church of England tells us in the preface to her ordination offices, that “from the Apostles’ time there have been three orders of ministers in Christ’s Church, bishops, and priests, and deacons,” and in her 23rd article, that “it is not lawful for any man to take upon him the office of public preaching, or ministering the sacraments in the congregation, before he be lawfully called and sent,” we Churchmen are bound to maintain that there are three Christian orders in the Church, and that “a religious community is not duly and fully a Church without them.” They who do not regard such a ministry as essential are quite consistent with their opinions in denouncing the expenditure which it entails, and would be justified in asking parliament for an educated religious police, in a dark uniform of strong cloth at £2 per man per week, to visit on week-a-days and preach on Sundays, countenanced and assisted, it might be, in towns by the Mayors and in villages by the squires, who should occasionally absolve and bless the congregation from the municipal or family pew. But they must not call themselves Churchmen.

Let us follow the example of our heroic chief, and not be ashamed of our faith. We shall be called bigots, sacerdotal despots, and the like, but we shall induce thoughtful men to make enquiries, and some to think with us. The Bishop of Lincoln’s pastoral to the Wesleyans was denounced as narrow-minded and repellent. But what has been the result ? Out of 63 students who have entered the Theological College at Lincoln, with a view to taking

holy orders, ten have come from the Nonconformists, of whom seven are Wesleyans, and these have stated that many others would follow their example were they not prevented by difficulties which arise, not *in foro conscientie*, not from spiritual, but from social and financial, sources.* Churchman or Nonconformist, let us say what we think. When we had a meeting some two years ago in the town of Nottingham, as to the reunion of Christians, an esteemed member of the Baptist Communion told us cordially and truthfully that the chief difficulty presented itself in this question of government. "For example," he said, "I call myself a bishop." I admit that this difficulty is a gigantic hindrance and discouragement, so great as to make any corporate return of the sects for the present hopeless; but it is well to know what the difficulty is, and if we have only faith in our Church we shall move mountains.

Then, as to property; our churchyards are not our own; they belong to our parishioners, upon conditions. Between earnest Churchmen and earnest Nonconformists an arrangement might, as I believe, be made; but the matter is taken out of their hands. It is not a religious, but a political question. And because there is to be not only trespass but desecration (if the churchyards belong to the nation, you cannot exclude the Atheist, much less the Deist!) you will resist that intrusion, which is sacrilege, until the law shall compel obedience.

I have spoken of the spirit in which, as it seems to me, we Churchmen should regard Dissent. May I offer to you, in conclusion, a few short suggestions which are, I hope, of a practical character. Church people should read, and should be taught by pastors and parents the history of the Church, and her claims as the ancient Church of this land upon their obedience and love. Ask the first dozen men you meet why they belong to the Church rather than to any other community of Christians, and you will be favoured in many cases with arguments which a clever Nonconformist would demolish as easily as your little brother puffed down in childhood the card house of which you were so proud. And Churchmen should acquaint themselves with the reasons why Nonconformists do not conform, and then instead of sneer and

* The Bishop, in acknowledging a copy of this paper, writes, "by a remarkable coincidence, it came to me with overtures from three Wesleyans, asking Ordination in the Church."

ridicule, and the notion that dissent springs only from the spirit of opposition, there will be towards those who are true to their principles, respect and a desire to conciliate. The Church should extend her ministrations and her means of grace among the classes with whom dissent has its chief influence. We need large churches, free and open. We want services, solemn, reverent, devotional, but bright, and simple, and short, to which working men can go, if they please, before and after their work. We want our Churches to be not houses of prayer only, nor houses of preaching, nor houses of music only, but that which so many churches profess to be, but are not, "places of worship." Places of praise and thanksgiving from the hearts of men, who know that the Lord is in His holy place, who know that the King is on His throne, who feel His Holy Spirit in their souls, who are sure that with angels and archangels, and all the company of heaven, they laud and magnify the glorious name who believe and realise the communion of saints. A few words specially as to preaching. A man who only reads other men's sermons, has mistaken his vocation—he is too idle, too ignorant, or too insincere to preach. Dr. Döllinger said to Mr. Gladstone, "depend upon it if the Church of England is to make way, and be a thoroughly national Church, the clergy must give up this preaching from written sermons." I believe that all honest men could do this efficiently; because, in the words of one of the most impressive of modern preachers, "I think it no extravagance to say, that a very inferior sermon delivered without book, answers the purpose for which all sermons are delivered more perfectly than one of great merit, if it be written and read." And why not more preachers? Why should not laymen be authorised to preach as of old, as the Franciscans? The Bishops could empower laymen to preach, just as Alexander of Jerusalem licensed Origen, before he was in Orders not only to teach but to preach in the catechetical schools of Alexandria. If not in churches, in mission rooms, school rooms, and wherever else they please, so that in church and out of church the poor might have the Gospel preached to them—not that vague, undefined, mysterious Gospel which so many talk about but so few explain, which means anything or nothing, but the Gospel in its purity, as our Lord preached it. "When thou doest thine alms—when thou prayest—when thou fastest—Do this in remem-

brance of Me.”—“If any man will come after Me, let him take up his cross and follow Me.”—“He that doeth the will shall know of the doctrine,”—“I was an hungred, and ye gave Me meat.” Preaching His words, and following His example, we must draw nearer to each other, as we draw nearer to Him, because (remember this above all things) if we follow His example, we shall pray for Unity; and this we can all do, Churchmen or Nonconformists, we can pray that He would gather together in one the children of God that are scattered abroad. Yes, if in a spirit of penitent humility, and yet with a courageous faith, if striving earnestly to redeem the past, to lead the truth, to preach the faith once delivered to the Saints, if bearing one another’s burdens, those burdens which oppress us body and soul, we pray that we may be, like the multitude of those that first believed, of one heart and one soul, in His own good time and way, He will give us our heart’s desire; and in that battle between good and evil, faith and unbelief, Christ and Antichrist, which is ever raging around and in us, the Church of England shall regain the alliance she has lost by proving that she has the right and the power to lead.



